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CAIRO FOR RELO
PARIS FOR ARS

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SCUL](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: SUDAN: EDUCATION MINISTER ON POTENTIAL COOPERATION

Ref: Maybury-Scholz e-mails 10/30/06 and previous

¶1. (U) Summary: Sudan's Minister of General Education, Dr. Hamid Mohammed Ibrahim, told PAO during an Oct. 31 courtesy call at the Ministry that he favored greater cooperation between the United States and Sudan on educational issues. The Education Minister, who oversees the K-12 system in Sudan, welcomed a late November visit by the Cairo-based Regional English Language Officer to consult with a broad spectrum of education officials about English language training needs specifically, and teacher training and curriculum development issues in general. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On Oct. 31, PAO, accompanied by Embassy Cultural Affairs Assistant and Information Resource Assistant, paid a courtesy call on Sudanese Minister of General Education, Dr. Hamid Mohammed Ibrahim. The meeting was both an opportunity for the PAO to introduce himself after just over one month in Sudan, but also to preview a planned visit to Sudan (Khartoum and Juba) in late November/early December by the Cairo-based Regional English Language Officer (RELO).

¶3. (U) The Education Minister assembled a high-level team that included the State Minister for General Education, Mohammed Abu Kalabeesh; the Under Secretary for Education, Dr. Mutasim Abdul Rahim (a graduate of the University of Indiana and Howard University); the Director General for the National Center for Curriculum and Educational Research, Dr. Mohammed Muzammel El Basheer; the Director for Educational Planning, Dr. Ibrahim El Desais; and the Director of Sudan Open University (distance learning), Dr. Ahmed El Tayeb.

Preview of RELO visit

¶4. (U) During the 45-minute exchange, PAO outlined the role of a RELO and the Embassy's desire to have broad and frank consultations with education officials during the RELO's mission. The minister welcomed the initiative. Sudan has its own institutions that are responsible for curriculum development, teacher training, and promoting the English language, the minister said. In addition, Sudan has many friends in the international community who are assisting it with education, including English language development. Despite this assistance, Sudan would like to see the United States play a greater role in the education field, he said. The minister added that Sudan had continued to offer public education despite years of civil conflict.

Revamping education

¶5. (U) The Sudanese educational establishment is under review, with

Education Ministry officials discussing how to revamp the K-12 curriculum to make it more relevant. Pressure is coming from all quarters, including parents, teachers, and politicians, said curriculum expert Dr. El Basheer (a graduate of Fort Wayne University and the University of Detroit). The ministry also faces the challenge of creating a national curriculum for all Sudanese pupils. A translation of the national curriculum from Arabic into English is under way, but the resources are lacking to complete the task. To complicate matters, Southern Sudan's educational establishment is already using Kenyan and Ugandan curricula. This has implications for graduation standards and university admissions.

El Basheer liked PAO's suggestion that Sudanese curriculum specialists have an opportunity to exchange ideas with a U.S. curriculum expert, possibly via DVC. In addition, some in South Sudan do not want as much Islamic education in the curriculum, and some want their children to have more exposure to English rather than Arabic.

¶6. (U) On a national level, there has been discussion about providing English as early as the third grade. Currently, public schools begin teaching English in grade 5. There were some who wanted to offer English as early as the first grade, but some parents objected to exposing their children to more than their mother tongue (Arabic) that early.

In-country travel to build contacts

¶7. (U) The minister approved PAO's notional plan for meeting school administrators, academics, and students in the greater Khartoum area and in other regions, although he underscored the importance of obtaining MFA and Interior Ministry consent prior to travel. (Note: Embassy PAS hopes to travel to Bakht El Ruda in El Dueim, a three-hour drive from Khartoum. El Dueim has hosted the National Center for Curriculum and Education Research since 1934 and is well-known for training curriculum specialists in the Middle East and Africa. End note.)

Comment:

¶8. (SBU) Education Minister Dr. Ibrahim appeared to be genuinely interested in developing educational cooperation with the United States. Following the meeting, he told Embassy Cultural Affairs Assistant that he would like to forget about politics and focus on education. The minister, who served as Dean of the Faculty of Education at Red Sea University (Eastern Sudan) prior to his nomination as Minister of Education, is a member of the opposition Democratic Union Party. His high-level team included a variety of political tendencies, including members of the ruling National Congress Party.

WHITAKER